

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE BULLETIN

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LIBERAL EDUCATION TODAY AS A TOOL OF WAR

As America enters its second year of war, liberal education is faced with the need to reaffirm its beliefs, to examine its fundamentals, to decide whether or not it is of any importance in time of war. In the light of an army policy which believes that the preservation of liberal education and its values demands the temporary suspension of such education, Black Mountain asks whether the successful prosecution of the war does not depend instead upon as completely and deeply educated a people as possible. Realizing the necessity of speed in the war effort, the College yet must question the narrow technical training the government is instituting. It asks whether some knowledge of—and more important, an enormous interest in—the social, psychological, historical, and economic backgrounds to the war; its possible outcomes, the civilizations and cultures out of which it grew, and the people who are fighting it, is not as necessary to a democratic army in a people's war as engineering and mathematical training. Intentionally or otherwise, the army training plan becomes a regimentation of thinking, a mass-production molding of ideas and personalities, a way of making functional soldier-mechanics instead of thinking men.

Most colleges and universities seem to agree wholly or at least in large measure with the government's plans. It is primarily outside of the

field of education that Black Mountain finds agreement with and support of its ideas. Wendell Willkie's Duke University speech echoes many things the College has been writing, saying, and living for ten years. "So important," said Mr Willkie, "are the liberal arts for our future civilization that I feel that education in them should be as much a part of our war planning as the more obviously needed technical training . . . Furthermore, the men and women who are devoting their lives to such studies should not be made to feel inferior or apologetic in the face of a P-T boat commander or the driver of a tank. They and all their fellow citizens should know that the preservation of our cultural heritages is not superfluous in a modern civilization; is not a luxury . . . It is what we are fighting for." Dorothy Thompson's December 29th column, "On the Value of Useless Knowledge", is perhaps over-emphatic, but says in substance many of the things in which Black Mountain believes.

The Black Mountain concept of liberal education differs in some ways from the education Willkie and Miss Thompson have spoken of; it is in no sense the exclusively academic education Willkie was defending, or the non-practical, non-specialist education Miss Thompson eulogized. Black Mountain makes academic training only part of its educational theory, and sees non-intellectual